

The queen sat serenely looking out of her bedroom window at the snow covered courtyard. At least, that's how it would appear to any onlookers. The queen actually had something else in mind, and no one was the wiser. More than anything, she wanted a child, and yet the king could not give her one. Most people had the inclination to blame the queen, but the king's doctor told the queen in whispered tones behind closed doors that the king was to blame. She would be unable to have a child as long as she stayed faithful to her husband, and as a queen, there were always eyes on her. So she figured out another way.

The queen gathered what she needed. Ebony black fabric, and the freshly fallen snow. She plucked a few of her own long hairs, braided them together, threaded her needle, and began to sew. She sewed with intention, weaving a bit of herself in and out of the small child sized dress she was making. Once she finished, the queen pricked her finger with the sewing needle and let her blood pour into her work. As she did this, the queen chanted. "Skin as white as freshly fallen snow, hair as black as ebony silk, and lips as red as the blood I give to her, my daughter Snow."

The queen had never tried magic like this before. Of course, she did have a bit of a talent for magic. One couldn't just begin with a spell for creating life. But in the past she had only ever used her magic to do chores and party tricks. Although she hadn't done any chores since marrying the king, so really it had just been party tricks for a long time. She hoped she had done the spell correctly. Big magic like that could have consequences.

Moments after her finger had stopped bleeding, the queen felt a fluttering in her stomach. She had been successful. Soon, there would be a child.

Snow's finger's itched. She had not been able to learn any more magic in weeks, not since she scared away her last tutor. She was a young lady, a beautiful and dainty princess, and it wasn't proper for her to learn the things she wanted to learn. Magic. Magic could create and destroy. Magic could make the world turn. Magic was everything. But all she was allowed to learn was how to make the piano play itself or how to rid her face of blemishes. As if she'd had any blemishes in the first place.

Snow winced as her maid Anisse tugged on her ebony curls. Anisse was always too rough with Snow's hair.

"I hear you're getting a new tutor today." Anisse said. It seemed to Snow that her maid was unable to stand a few moments of silence. She was always trying to make unnecessary conversation.

Snow twitched her fingers anxiously. Maybe she could get this one to teach her more. "Yes, that's right."

"How many is that this year, then? Three? Four?" Anisse asked, digging a pin sharply into Snow's scalp.

Anisse was right. This would be the fourth tutor this year. In Snow's desperation to learn what no one would teach her, she was becoming very intense, almost frightening. And it didn't help that she was fully aware of her power and status as a princess and had no problem wielding that power over people to get what she wanted.

"Yes, I supposed my father will just have to find me someone more intelligent. I've gotten too smart for all the previous tutors." Snow said lightly. This was only partially true.

Tugging one final curled lock of hair into place, Anisse patted Snow's head. "We're almost done here."

Anisse grabbed a small wooden box from Snow's vanity and opened it. The box was lined with green velvet and contained a small silver circlet with glittering filigree and dark green emeralds. It wasn't quite as fancy as the one Snow wore for special occasions, in fact it was a little bit tarnished. It would need a good polishing soon. But it had belonged to Snow's mother.

Anisse set the circlet on top of Snow's delicately arranged curls. "You're looking more and more like her every day."

Snow cleared her throat. "Thank you Anisse. That will be all." She waved a hand dismissing her faithful servant. She hated it when Anisse talked about her mother. It was still a bit of a sore spot. Snow's mother had been sick ever since she was born, her health waning as Snow got older, and one day, as her health began to fail completely, Snow's mother told her everything. She told Snow how her blood coursed through Snow's veins and about a spell gone awry. She told Snow of the magic that had created her. The magic that could create anything. Or destroy. Snow's life was draining her mother.

And then her mother went to sleep. She was still breathing, still alive, but she never woke up. She was kept in a room at the top of the north tower. Snow's father never visited her, and neither did Snow.

Anyway, Anisse was wrong. Snow looked nothing like her mother. She wished her maid would stop being so patronizing.

Snow stood up and smoothed down her dress—a fluffy blue affair with ruffles and ribbons that Snow hated but which was appropriate for a young lady of her position. It was time for her to bid her father good morning and meet her new tutor.

She could only hope this one might be better than the last. Her father might give up all together and stop hiring any new tutors leaving Snow without the one thing she wanted. She could

handle the annoying pleasantries with people she didn't like, she could handle the fluffy dresses and the princess perfect manners as long as she had a chance at the one thing she was so often denied.

Magic.

Her fingers twitched at her sides. She needed it like she needed food or water or air. It ran through her in a way no one else could understand.

Snow reached the dining room and shoved the doors open, not wanting to wait any longer. She rushed in at an almost unladylike speed and checked herself, knowing it was important to keep up her façade of propriety. Must not scare this one away. Must not be too eager. Must pretend everything is normal.

Snow's father, a large and boisterous man, greeted her. "Good morning, Snow. Glad to see you've finally joined us."

"Yes, I would have been down sooner, but Anisse took an especially long time with my hair." Snow said, deciding to blame her lateness on the maid that annoyed her so rather than the fact that she had slept late.

The king furrowed his brow. "Well make sure she's more punctual next time. You have a new tutor to answer to and I don't think she'll appreciate such tardiness."

"Yes, of course father. My apologies." Snow sat down next to her father at the table. It was a long table full of food, much more than the two of them could eat, but Snow was used to this. Snow picked up an apple from a tray laden with fruit and bit into it, savoring the sweetness and the crunch.

"Make sure to finish up quickly so you can begin your lessons. It took us long enough to find someone who would tutor you, you're getting a bit behind now. I think word is beginning to

spread that you're a difficult student." The king grumbled eyeing his daughter who he imagined was perfect in all ways but this. He had no idea what drove these poor tutors away, but was sure it would be impossible to find another if this one were to leave.

Snow finished her apple and grabbed another. "Where is this tutor?" She asked, looking around the room. This was a small dining room, but the table was long enough to seat sixteen people. In case they had guests, which was rare, and anyway guests were usually seated in the larger dining rooms. Snow supposed the larger dining rooms were more impressive. Although Snow loved the riches and power that came with being royalty, she didn't quite understand the need to show off this way. Who was going to eat all this extra food? Why set the table for sixteen when it was just Snow and her father? It was just wasteful.

Snow's father looked at her meaningfully. "You were running late this morning, dear. The tutor has been waiting for you in the library."

Snow let out a decidedly unladylike snort. "Well why didn't you say anything? You just let me sit here carrying on eating my apples when there are lessons to be learned."

"It's not so easy to learn on an empty stomach is it? Hurry and finish up, now."

Snow gobbled down the rest of her apple and left the core on the golden plate in front of her. Really, why did the plates have to be gold? It just seemed excessive.

Snow rushed down to the library and found her new tutor sitting in a plush high backed chair—one of Snow's favorites—with her feet propped up on a table. It was such a strangely informal thing to do in a place as formal as a royal palace. Snow decided immediately that she liked this woman.

On the table next to the tutor's feet was a pile of books. She also held a book in her hands that she didn't look up from as she said "You're late."

Snow curtsied. “Yes, I’m so very sorry.” Snow widened her big green eyes and pouted her red lips a little bit, a look she had practiced many times in the mirror. It made her look younger than her sixteen years, and so much more innocent.

The tutor looked up from her book. Now that Snow could see her face, she could see that the tutor was a bit younger than she had expected. Her last tutors had been so much older with wrinkles and grey hair. This woman looked mature, though not old. Late thirties or early forties, perhaps. She had dark hair piled messily on top of her head, and spectacles attached to a little chain around her neck. She studied Snow with dark eyes peering over her glasses. “You’ll find those innocent wide eyed looks have no effect on me, your highness. Come sit. We must get started.”

Snow’s head began to spin. Her wide eyes worked on everyone. She had that look down to an exact science. She had practiced it so much it looked natural. Not like something practiced to gain sympathy. How had she seen through it so well?

Trying to get a handle on the situation, Snow tried again. “I’m sorry. I didn’t catch your name. Miss . . .?”

“Grimes. Miss Fallina Grimes. And you’re Princess Snow Henlock the only daughter of King Morelan Henlock and Queen Salla Henlock. From what I gather, you tend to chase away tutors and sometimes even household staff. No one quite understands why, or they won’t speak about it, but I won’t be going anywhere and I can see right through your insincerities, so don’t bother. You’re here to learn about the history of your family and kingdom, as well as the surrounding kingdoms and their politics. One day it will be your duty to marry someone from those surrounding kingdoms and be a queen both of this nation and of that one. It’s my job to make sure that you understand at least the academic portion of your responsibilities, is that clear?”

“Yes that’s clear, but if you don’t mind Miss Grimes, may I ask what your credentials are?”

Snow was feeling obstinate and didn’t appreciate that she couldn’t seem to get a hold on Miss Grimes the way she was able to get a hold on other people. And who was she to teach someone as important as Snow? What did she know about the responsibilities of running a kingdom?

“I am university educated. I actually knew Queen Salla quite well before she was a queen. I have educated others of similar standing who all seem to be doing quite well in their current roles.” Snow opened her mouth to say more, but Miss Grimes cut her off. “I assure you, King Morelan checked extensively with my previous employers and I am more than qualified to teach you, so if you would stop stalling and open the book in front of you we can begin.”

Snow reached for the book in front of her, not hearing a word Miss Grimes said. She was stuck on the fact that her new tutor had known her mother quite well. Before she had been queen. Possibly Miss Grimes knew how her mother had learned magic. Possibly she knew some herself. She might even teach Snow. If Snow could only figure her out. How could she convince this woman to teach her something she wasn’t supposed to be learning in the first place?

Her fingers twitched. She longed to feel the buzz of magic in her hands.

“Snow!” Miss Grimes sounded exasperated. How many times had she said Snow’s name?

“Yes?”

“I need you paying attention. Quickly now, tell me about your kingdom.”

Snow sighed. She had been through this too many times already. “The kingdom of Abnoba, a mountainous region known for its vast riches and population of dwarves. Main exports are precious metals and gems such as gold, silver, diamonds, and emeralds. This is mainly due to the labor of dwarves who my family has extensive treaties with. The dwarves have seats on our council and a say in the ruling of the kingdom. This is what makes Abnoba unique.”

“Good.” Said Miss Grimes. “And the neighboring kingdoms?”

Snow rattled off all the information Miss Grimes asked of her in a monotone voice. Her mouth was moving, but her mind was wandering. Fingers twitching, Snow thought about the garden just outside the library window. She could coax the flowers into growing. There was a rose bush in the garden that had yet to bloom. She could help it along if she could just make it through this lesson. She just had to make it through the morning.

Hours later, the clock struck noon. In each of the twelve chimes it was almost as if Snow could feel the reverberations in her chest. The clock was made by dwarves as was much of the castle, and the pendulum swung through the exact center of the castle. You could hear the chimes anywhere you were on the grounds. Including in your own head if you were tuning out the voice of a particularly obnoxious tutor.

“Well” said Miss Grimes. “We are done for the afternoon. We will pick back up tomorrow morning. And don’t be late.”

Snow gave a polite curtsy and ran out to the garden. She breathed in the fresh air, so much better than the stuffy library. The scent of flowers and apple blossoms floated to Snow on the gentle breeze, and the sound of birdsong calmed her nerves. She walked up to the rosebush, still not in bloom, put her hands on it, and did the one thing she had been longing to do all day.

Magic. It could create life, it could destroy life. It could make the world turn. Magic was everything.